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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**Title:**

**The Influence of Field Marshal Colmar Von Der Goltz on Ottoman Military Effectiveness  
in Mesopotamia: December 1915 to April 1916**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Author:**

**Major Peter M. Rummler**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Edward J. Erickson Ph.D.

Approved: Edward J. Erickson

Date: 23 Feb 2012

Oral Defense Committee Member: Pauletta Otis Ph.D.

Approved: Pauletta Otis

Date: 23 Feb 2012

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** The Influence of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz on Ottoman Military Effectiveness in Mesopotamia: December 1915 to April 1916

**Author:** Major Peter M. Rummel, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The British overestimated the influence of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz on Ottoman military effectiveness during the Mesopotamian Campaign.

**Discussion:** Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz was a German advisor to the Ottoman Military from 1883 to 1885 and head of the German Military Mission from 1885 to 1895. During this period von der Goltz used his influence with the Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid II, to implement key military reforms within the Ottoman Empire. The improvements included an updated military education system for officers and the purchase of modern weapons. Though he left in 1895, von der Goltz remained friends with many of the Ottoman military officers that he helped train. He visited the Ottoman Empire when possible and provided new ideas on military improvement. For example, in 1910, while von der Goltz visited, he planted the ideas that were responsible for the Ottoman Empire adopting a triangular division structure.

The outbreak of World War I brought von der Goltz out of retirement to advise the Ottoman military again. During this assignment, Enver Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of War, asked him to command the newly formed Ottoman Sixth Army in Mesopotamia. He assumed these duties on 6 December 1915 after arrival in Baghdad.

The British Mesopotamian Campaign began with the initial landings of the Indian Expeditionary Force D on 5 November 1914 in southern Iraq. The British were quickly able to achieve success fighting an under strength and under equipped Ottoman force in the area. These quick victories emboldened them, and their objectives expanded to include the seizure of Baghdad. The Ottomans, realizing that they had underestimated the threat in Mesopotamia, hurried to push troops to the theater of operations and gradually improved their forces in both quantity and quality. The Ottoman commander, Colonel Nurettin, was eventually able to amass the combat power to defeat the British at Salman Pak and invest them at Kut.

Von der Goltz arrived just as the investment of Kut was completed and allowed Nurettin to continue his military operations with little interference. The British saw von der Goltz's arrival as having more effect on day to day tactical operations than it actually did. This assumption was not surprising as the British commander invested at Kut, Major General Townshend, was an admirer of von der Goltz. From his arrival until his death the British credited most Ottoman successes in the Sixth Army area of operations to von der Goltz while chastising the Ottoman commanders for failures.

**Conclusion:** Von der Goltz played a key role in setting the conditions for the successful investment of Kut and subsequent British surrender by improving the quality of the Ottoman military. However, he had little direct tactical role. Von der Goltz instead focused on the operational employment of his army. Because of British biases of the time they overestimated his influence and underestimated the capabilities of the Ottoman commanders.

*Illustrations*

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*Preface*

This paper examines the influence of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz on the Ottoman military effectiveness and how the British understood it. Military effectiveness includes the large scale preparations and institutional changes a nation's military takes to prepare itself for war. These changes are clearly attributable to von der Goltz while an advisor. Over time, these improvements in Ottoman military effectiveness translated into improved combat effectiveness. Combat effectiveness refers to the actual fighting that takes place within wars at both the tactical and operational levels. Because of this distinction this paper deliberately focuses on how the von der Goltz improved the military effectiveness of the Ottomans, thus contributing to the combat effectiveness of Ottoman commanders against the British.

I chose this topic because von der Goltz is my great-great-grandfather and I want to learn more about him. My hopes to structure the entire paper around him quickly faded as I found out that there is not much written about him in English. Most sources on von der Goltz are written in German or Turkish. Because of this limitation and with the advice of my MMS mentor, Dr. Edward Erickson, I chose to modify my topic to include British views on his influence. The added refinement of my topic provided me with enough information written in English to structure an argument around. My intentions for writing this paper cause me to focus heavily on biographical and background information but that is exactly the information that I wanted to uncover through my research.

## Introduction

The British Mesopotamian Campaign started on 5 November 1914. The British, who initially intended to seize the area required to secure their oil interests in Mesopotamia, expanded their mission as successes mounted. For over a year Mesopotamia was the most successful World War I combat theater for the British. Then, beginning with the Battle of Salman Pak in November 1915, the British forces suffered a series of defeats culminating in the unconditional surrender of the Indian 6th *Poona* Division, commanded by Major General Charles Townshend. An army that the British considered to be second rate defeated them and forced the largest surrender of troops under British command since the battle of Yorktown in 1781.<sup>1</sup> The defeat by the Ottomans humiliated the British who advanced many reasons for the failure. One name that appeared repeatedly, as it related to Ottoman successes, in both the British Official History and Townshend's autobiography was that of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz, commander of the Ottoman Sixth Army.<sup>2</sup>

Von der Goltz was a well known and respected military theorist by the beginning of World War I. He influenced Ottoman military development immensely since being assigned to the German Military Mission in Constantinople in 1883.<sup>3</sup> He spent twelve years<sup>4</sup> advising the Ottomans before returning to Germany where he continued his military career until his retirement. At the outbreak of World War I Germany called him to service again and assigned him to the German Military Mission in Constantinople. While there he was given command of the Ottoman Sixth Army.<sup>5</sup> During his four months in command, von der Goltz focused on the operational level of war and planning for future operations in Persia. However, the British Official History and Townshend's autobiography both indicated he routinely influenced combat operations on a lower tactical level. Alternatively, the Ottoman commander's decisions were

criticized and their successful decisions minimized. During his command of the Sixth Army, the British overestimated the influence of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz on Ottoman military effectiveness during the Mesopotamia campaign.

### Biography of Von Der Goltz

Wilhelm Leopold Colmar von der Goltz was born to Erhard Wilhelm von der Goltz and Palmyre Schubert on 12 August 1843 in Bielkenfeld, Prussia.<sup>6</sup> Von der Goltz began his military service in 1861 and served in the 1866 Austro-Prussian war and in 1870 and 1871 in the Franco-Prussian war before being assigned to the German general staff.<sup>7</sup> He served as on the general staff developing a reputation as a skilled officer and was subsequently assigned as an instructor at the Berlin Military Academy



Figure 1. Colmar von der Goltz, Photograph, from *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, accessed December 29, 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/136577/Colmar-baron-von-der-Goltz>

from 1878 to 1883.<sup>8</sup> He was also an author, and he is known for two of his more recognized books, *Leon Gambetta and his Armies* (1877) and *The Nation in Arms* (1883).<sup>9</sup> Because of his reputation as a skilled educator he was dispatched to the Ottoman Empire on 18 June 1883 as a German military advisor to head reforms in the Ottoman military education system. Two years later he was required to assume the responsibilities of Head of the German Military Reform Mission in Constantinople when the previous commander, Colonel Otto Kaehler, died.<sup>10</sup> He

continued to serve as an advisor to the Ottomans until 1895<sup>11</sup> and returned to Germany as a brigadier general.<sup>12</sup> After returning to Germany, von der Goltz served from 1896 to 1898 as the commander of the 5th Division at Frankfurt and was promoted to lieutenant general during this period. From 1898 to 1902 he served as Chief of the Corps of Engineers and Pioneers, Inspector of Fortifications, and in 1902 he was assigned to command the German Army's I Corps. He was promoted to field marshal in 1911 and retired in 1913.<sup>13</sup> With the outbreak of World War I von der Goltz returned to active duty and was appointed the governor-general of German occupied Belgium on 26 August 1914.<sup>14</sup> Following this brief assignment he was again sent to Constantinople as an advisor. His influence in the Ottoman army remained strong and he continued to command a great deal of respect with many of the army leaders. He arrived on 12 December 1914 and by March 1915 commanded the German Military Mission and the Ottoman First Army.<sup>15</sup> Then, on 5 October 1915, the Ottoman Sixth Army was created in Mesopotamia and von der Goltz was given command of it.<sup>16</sup> He arrived in Baghdad on 6 December 1915 to take command but directly participated in no major combat operations prior to his death from typhus on 19 April 1916 in Baghdad, Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

### **Von Der Goltz's Influence on the Ottoman Army**

The Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid II, desired to improve his military after its defeat by the Russians during the Ottoman - Russian war of 1877 to 1878. The Ottomans requested help from the Germans in 1880 and the German Military Reform Mission, commanded by Colonel Otto Kaehler, arrived in 1882.<sup>18</sup> Colonel Kaehler's mission evaluated the state of the Ottoman military upon its arrival in Constantinople and after six months the mission made its recommendation to Abdulhamid. The recommended improvements included reforms to the

reserve structure, logistic structure, mobilization plans, command and control structure, and military education system of Ottoman forces. What interested the sultan the most; however, were those that advocated the improvement of the Ottoman military education system,<sup>19</sup> so the German general staff, at the request of Abdulhamid, assigned von der Goltz to focus on the improvement of the military education system.<sup>20</sup>

## **Military Education**

Von der Goltz, then a major, arrived in Constantinople in mid 1883 to fulfill the duties of advisor to the Ottoman Military Academy, Mekteb-I Harbiye.<sup>21</sup> He was a staunch proponent of a highly trained professional officer corps<sup>22</sup> and agreed with the same shortfalls identified by Kaehler. He disapproved of the highly technical curriculum used at the military academy because it included lessons such as advanced mathematics and physics that had little application in a military education. He advocated that the curriculum be changed to exclude the more technical courses and introduced practical application of the remaining courses to military matters. He also emphasized the importance of regimental tours to give the officers experience and allow them an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. By 1884 von der Goltz's influence resulted in modification to the curriculum along these lines and facilitated a five-fold increase in the number of graduates over the next fourteen years.<sup>23</sup> The military academy dropped some of the technical courses while application lessons were added. However, the core of the curriculum remained technical because the Ottomans required that the school produce graduates who could contribute to the civilian, as well as the military, well being of the empire.<sup>24</sup>

Von der Goltz reformed the War College, a component of the military academy, to a much larger degree. He improved the curriculum for general staff officers and ensured that they

were selected from the top three percent of the students attending the military academy. Von der Goltz, a German general staff officer himself, believed in the German military model which recognized trained general staff officers as military elite. With this model in mind he strove to develop the Ottoman War College using the same model.<sup>25</sup> War College graduates developed a high degree of camaraderie and trust with one another due to their relatively small numbers and high level of education. Additionally, because the most influential billets within the military were reserved for the War College graduates,<sup>26</sup> they would continue to interact and build their relationships throughout their careers. This base of highly trained officers developed the Ottoman military into an organization that was able to achieve tactical and operational victories over the British during World War I.

In addition to improving the quality of the education provided by the Ottoman military academy von der Goltz arranged for Ottoman officers to train in Germany. These assignments began in 1883 with ten officers being selected to take part in the multi-year training.<sup>27</sup> The training consisted of both tours with regular German army units and attendance at the German War Academy in Berlin.<sup>28</sup> The Ottoman officers attending this training further developed an understanding German military and civilian culture.<sup>29</sup>

## **Arms Modernization**

After the death of Kaehler in 1885, von der Goltz became the head of the German mission. His involvement expanded to include all aspects of German assistance to the Ottomans. In 1885 the Sultan's desire to modernize military equipment<sup>30</sup> and von der Goltz's influence resulted in Krupp securing a large contract to provide modern artillery to the Ottoman Empire. The artillery included large caliber guns that were designed for use in fixed positions such as in

the coastal defenses of the Dardanelles, but, more importantly, it included mobile artillery and mortars for use by the army.<sup>31</sup> The artillery was a key factor in modernization for von der Goltz. He emphasized the importance of artillery in support of offensive operations in his books, *The Nation in Arms*, originally published in 1883,<sup>32</sup> and, *The Conduct of War*, originally published in 1898.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, he contended that the accuracy and high rate of fire allowed by military small arms of the time necessitated close artillery support to allow infantry to advance without incurring unacceptable losses.<sup>34</sup>

In 1887 von der Goltz assisted Isidor Loewe, of Ludwig Loewe & Co., and Paul Mauser, of Waffenfabrik Mauser, in securing a contract for over 500,000 Model 1887 rifles to replace the Ottoman's aging Snider and Peabody-Martini rifles. The rifle was still chambered for a black powder cartridge, 9.5x60R, but it contained an eight shot magazine which greatly increased the Ottoman soldier's potential rate of fire. Loewe and Mauser delivered 220,000 Model 1887 rifles to the Ottomans before the contract was modified to the more modern model 1890 Mauser in 1890. The Model 1890 Mauser chambered in 7.65x53 was the first Ottoman standard issue rifle to be chambered in a modern smokeless powder cartridge, and the remaining 280,000 rifles were delivered in this configuration. Continuing the upgrades, the Ottomans ordered 201,100 Mauser Model 1893 rifles prior to von der Goltz departing in 1895.<sup>35</sup> Von der Goltz's efforts ensured that the Ottomans were equipped with some of the most modern military weapons available.

## **Reorganization**

As a result of von der Goltz's success securing weapons contracts for Germany's munitions industry the German Emperor, William I, encouraged him to stay in Constantinople beyond his initial three year commitment, 1883 to 1886. This worked in von der Goltz's favor as

he sought additional influence with the Sultan and used his possible departure as leverage to convince the Sultan to appoint him head of a new Commission for Reorganization.<sup>36</sup> Von der Goltz used this influence to introduce reform throughout the Ottoman army.

Conscription was reformed with the introduction of a new law in 1886.<sup>37</sup> Von der Goltz was of the opinion that conscript armies were more effective than volunteer armies and he based this on the army's composition. He discussed this concept in detail in his book, *The Nation in Arms*.<sup>38</sup> Lower class citizens looking for work composed volunteer armies while a cross section of the society motivated by national pride composed conscript armies.<sup>39</sup> The conscript army was therefore more effective because its soldiers would continue to fight when volunteers motivated by money would not. The new law required conscription to take place only once a year and each reserve (*Redif*) battalion headquarters was designated the recruiting center for that area.

Recruiting took place under a conscription committee. As expected, the committee contained military members, but it was chaired by the local mayor to ensure local concerns were addressed. The law also abolished the practice of substitution, although the duration active service could be reduced with a standardized payment.<sup>40</sup> All of these measures taken together produced a conscript force that was better organized, fairly recruited, and better represented a cross section of society.

Von der Goltz also influenced the Ottoman decision to reform their military organizational structure. He influenced the Ottomans to reorganize their territory into seven military districts with corresponding numbered armies using a continental territorial system.<sup>41</sup> The reorganization better balanced the populations and military responsibilities in each district. The fifth and sixth districts, for example, were designed to maintain relative Arab homogeneity.<sup>42</sup> The Ottomans also organized their *Redif* into units up to division level and

expanded the reserve system to include a newly established home guard (*Mustafiz*). Depots were established in each district to supply weapons and provisions as reserve units were mobilized. As the system matured, active (*Nizamiye*) units in each army provided training and instruction to the *Redif* units and full time commanders were designated. All of these measures sought to ensure that an army composed primarily of reserves could be mobilized and integrated into the active force on short notice.<sup>43</sup>

By 1889 the influence of the German Military Reform Mission declined because the Sultan became aware of von der Goltz's low opinion of him and his senior officers. Von der Goltz based his low opinion of the sultan on his resistance to change. While he was of the opinion that the senior Ottoman military officers did not perform poorly. The poor performance of senior Ottoman officers was not surprising given that they were appointed for their loyalty to the sultan regardless of whether they were effective military commanders and usually had limited military education. Von der Goltz; however, was an admirer of the younger officers and enlisted men of the Ottoman army, and he respected them. He saw in them the capacity to change the Ottoman Empire for the better. Despite his declining influence, Von der Goltz continued in his role as the head of the German mission until 1895 when he returned to Germany.<sup>44</sup>

## **Reorganization of 1910**

Following his return to Germany von der Goltz remained in contact with many of the Ottoman officers that he helped train.<sup>45</sup> Through them he was able to stay engaged in military developments occurring inside of the Ottoman Empire and discuss current military events outside of the empire. He also visited on several occasions and traveled to Constantinople on an

inspection tour on 12 July 1909. While there, von der Goltz observed the Ottoman maneuvers designed to test reorganizational concepts. During these maneuvers, he provided his ideas on a new division structure which the Ottomans decided to test. The Ottomans asked von der Goltz to run the maneuvers to test his ideas, and he did. With the help of a working group he produced after action reports on these exercises but was required to return to Germany in early 1910 prior to the Ottomans reaching the a decision on their final structure.<sup>46</sup>

At the time, the Ottomans, along with the bulk of European militaries, were using a square division structure of two infantry brigades each with two infantry regiments. Von der Goltz saw the weakness in the square structure as its inflexibility. His answer was a triangular division with three infantry regiments working directly for the division. He recognized and commented on the problem at least as early as 1883 when he mentioned it in his book, *The Nation in Arms*.<sup>47</sup> By the fifth edition of this book, which was published in 1899, he specifically outlined his proposed answer as what we know today as a triangular division.<sup>48</sup>

On 10 July 1910 the Ottomans issued their reorganization instruction. In it they specified the reorganization of their unit structure based on the triangular division. This structure enabled the division commander to maintain one-third of his force in reserve. This reserve provided the commander with the ability to affect the battle even after committing the majority, two-thirds, of his force to the fight. The flexibility the triangular structure provided was not possible in a square unit structure previously employed without the destruction of unit integrity.

The Ottomans also directed the adoption of the corps system which was then currently in use throughout the rest of Europe. It too would be triangular with three infantry divisions. During the reorganization the Ottomans implemented other changes, but the adoption of the triangular structure at the corps level and below was the most significant. Almost all European

powers decided to adopt it by the end of World War I after its effectiveness was proven on the battlefield.<sup>49</sup>

### **The British Mesopotamian Campaign**

#### **Von Der Goltz Returns to Ottoman Service**

Von der Goltz returned to the newly reestablished German military mission in Constantinople on 12 December 1914 to assist General Otto Liman von Sanders, its commander, as hostilities against the allies intensified.<sup>50</sup> On 24 March 1915, the Ottoman Fifth Army was activated to defend the Dardanelles, and the Ottomans gave Limon von Sanders command. With Limon von Sanders' move to Fifth Army, von der Goltz took command of the First Army and the German military mission which were both previously commanded by Limon von Sanders.<sup>51</sup> Von der Goltz remained in command of these two units until given command of Sixth Army in Mesopotamia when it was activated on 5 October 1915. He physically took command on 6 December 1915 when he arrived in Baghdad.<sup>52</sup>

#### **The Origin of British Campaign and Indirect Influence of Von Der Goltz**

Von der Goltz arrival; however, was not the beginning of the Mesopotamian Campaign which had started in 1914. The British committed their first forces to Mesopotamia on 5 November 1914 with a brigade landing at Fao at the entrance to the Shatt al Arab. Its mission was to ensure continued British access to oil from Abadan Island. The British force, Indian Expeditionary Force D, was composed mainly of Indians because Mesopotamia fell under the responsibility of the India Office.<sup>53</sup> The British landed an additional brigade and division headquarters in November and seized Basra on 22 November 1914. British victories continued

with the seizure of Qurna, another 50 miles inland, on 9 December 1914. These successes emboldened the British, and the initial objective of the campaign began to shift. A British political agent with the expedition, Sir Percy Cox, talked of the seizure of Baghdad, and he is thought to have passed his thoughts on to the British Viceroy of India, Lord Charles Hardinge, when he visited Mesopotamia in February 1915.<sup>54</sup>

In April 1915 Lieutenant General Sir John Nixon, the new commander of Indian Expeditionary Force D, arrived in Basra with additional troops. The British force in Mesopotamia now consisted of a corps size unit composed of the 6th and 12th Indian Divisions. He also arrived with instructions to occupy the whole of Basra province which required him to capture Nasiriya on the Euphrates River and Amara on the Tigris River. Nixon sent the 12th Division, commanded by Major General Gorringe, to seize Nasiriya and the 6th Division, commanded by Major General Charles Townshend, to seize Amara. Both objectives were in the hands of the British by the end of July. These military successes encouraged Nixon to seek permission to pursue the Ottomans further north. Lord Hardinge granted Nixon permission to pursue the Ottomans after he was given permission to expand the objective of the expedition beyond Basra Province by the British Secretary of State for India, Sir Joseph Austen Chamberlain.<sup>55</sup> The expansion of the campaign objectives was not surprising given that the timing coincided with stalemate of British forces on the Western Front and Gallipoli. Comparatively, the Mesopotamian Campaign must have seemed to be conspicuously successful.

Townshend's 6th Division continued to advance up the Tigris River. By the end of September 1915 he had seized Kut and continued to advance beyond Aziziya which was located another fifty miles upriver. Nixon relocated his headquarters to Aziziya as Townshend advanced and reported to General Staff in India that the Ottomans had occupied a defense at Salman Pak

(Ctesiphon). Additionally, on 8 October 1915 Nixon reported that he had sufficient forces currently available to defeat Colonel Nurettin İbrahim Pasha, Commander of the Iraq Area Command,<sup>56</sup> but that he would need another division if Baghdad needed to be held for a length of time. Townshend did not agree with Nixon's optimism. He believed that at least two divisions would be required to seize Baghdad. Despite Townshend's protest, Nixon continued to convey optimism to his superiors who on 24 October 1915 authorized the seizure of Baghdad. Thus, on 20 November 1915 the 6th Division began their movement to attack and seize Baghdad.<sup>57</sup>

The reasons for the success of the British from November 1914 to November 1915 are relatively easy to see. Mesopotamia initially fell into the Ottoman Fourth Army area of responsibility. This army was a low priority for the Ottomans. It suffered from being poorly equipped and resourced. It had no heavy artillery or aircraft, outdated model 1887 rifles,<sup>58</sup> minimal logistical assets, and low manning levels during peace time. Furthermore, it still retained the outdated square corps structure. The Ottoman military compounded these problems when it implemented a national mobilization plan in August 1914 that removed the Fourth Army headquarters, both XIII and XII Corps headquarters, and three of the four assigned infantry divisions for service in the west and north. By October 1914 only the 38th Infantry Division remained to defend the entire Fourth Army area, which had been redesignated the Iraq Area Command. After the initial British successes, Ismail Enver Pasha, Ottoman Minister of War, returned the 35th Division to Mesopotamia in February 1915. After this failed to stop the British gains in Mesopotamia, Enver ordered the 45th Division to Mesopotamia in August 1915, and it arrived in early October. Then on 4 October 1915, he ordered the 51st and 52nd Divisions to Baghdad. The 51st Division arrived first in mid November 1915.<sup>59</sup> For the first time, Nurettin

had a force large enough to successfully maneuver against Townshend and dug in to defend at Salman Pak.

Townshend maneuvered his division toward Salman Pak with a good idea of the Ottoman location but lacking an understanding of how the Ottoman capability had changed. He attacked on 22 November 1915. Nurettin defended in a well prepared L-shape defense with his fresh and better equipped Anatolian troops, the 45th Division, in the most vulnerable position on his northern flank. Additionally, he formed a division sized reserve, the newly arrived 51st Division, which increased his ability to react. Townsend obliged Nurettin by concentrating his attack on the 45th Division where he intended to rupture the Ottoman defenses and flank the remainder of Nurettin's forces as they tried to fall back. The 45th Division committed its local reserves and was able to halt the British after initially falling back to their secondary trenches. Nurettin, realizing that he was being flanked, committed the 51st Division to prevent Townshend from successfully flanking his forces. Simultaneously, Nurettin reinforced his main defensive lines by repositioning the 35th Division while the remainder of his force was in contact. After two days Townshend's 6th Division was spent, and he was forced to begin a withdrawal to Kut. Nurettin would pursue him.<sup>60</sup>

Townshend started to withdraw from Salman Pak on the evening of 25 November 1915. The bulk of Nurettin's forces followed on the 28 November 1915. As Townshend continued to retreat down river along the Tigris the Ottomans caught up with him on several occasions. This pressure forced the Townsend to conduct forced marches to stay ahead of them.<sup>61</sup> On 2 December 1915 Townshend made his decision to defend at Kut while still on the march. His men were exhausted from the long retreat from Salman Pak, and Kut already held supplies he could use in the defense. His forces arrived in Kut on 3 December and began to prepare

defensive positions. Townshend's opinion on whether he had made the right decision to stay at Kut waivered as he received word from Nixon that he would have to hold Kut for two months prior to relief. On 6 December he requested to withdraw further downstream but was ordered by Nixon to stay at Kut.<sup>62</sup> By 7 December Nurettin completed his physical encirclement of Kut, and he ordered a covering force to emplace ten miles downstream to prevent interference by any British relief force. The Investment of Kut was complete. He relayed this information to von der Goltz who had now taken command of the Sixth Army in Baghdad.<sup>63</sup>

Up to this point in the Mesopotamian Campaign von der Goltz had no direct impact on the operations conducted by the Iraq Area Command. Von der Goltz affected this early stage of the campaign indirectly through the influence he had exerted on the Ottoman military leadership both when he was an advisor from 1883 to 1895 and on his continued visits after his return to Germany. The improved military education and triangular unit structure resulted in a much more capable Iraq Area Command. Nurettin, while he did not graduate of the Ottoman War College, graduated from the Ottoman Military Academy in 1893. He served on regimental, corps and army staffs. He also served as a regimental and division commander in combat before being assigned to the Iraq Area Command.<sup>64</sup> In order for him to be successful and continue to advance in these billets he had to learn from and be competitive with the War College graduates. He demonstrated this knowledge at Salman Pak when he employed multiple corps size units to defeat the British, rapidly pursue them, and effectively invest them when the opportunity presented itself. While not having a direct input in the Mesopotamian Campaign from November 1914 to December 1915 von der Goltz enabled Nurettin to acquire the military education he needed, and he advocated the triangular unit structure that allowed him to prevail

against the British. These educational and doctrinal improvements to the Ottoman military were not acknowledged by the British until after they were defeated by the Ottomans.

### **Direct Influence of Von Der Goltz**

The perceived influence of von der Goltz on the Mesopotamian Campaign was amplified by Townshend's perception of western European racial superiority to Ottoman forces. He did not respect Nurettin even after he was defeated at Salman Pak. He spoke highly of the Ottoman soldiers, as long as they were in the defense,<sup>65</sup> but he attributed officer effectiveness with German officer presence.<sup>66</sup> No German officers were present prior to von der Goltz's arrival on 6 December 1915 after the battle was long over. Overall, his opinion is not surprising given his similar comments which blamed the lack of white officers in his Indian division for their premature falling back during the battle of Salman Pak.<sup>67</sup> The superiority felt by Townshend was common for the time and even the British Official History of the campaign speaks poorly of Arabs.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand Townshend had great respect for von der Goltz.<sup>69</sup> He said that the envelopment tactics he used at Salman Pak were the same as those outlined by von der Goltz in his book, *The Nation in Arms*.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Townshend's dislike of the Ottomans and respect for von der Goltz caused him to overestimate von der Goltz's influence out of proportion to his actual involvement.

Townshend knew von der Goltz was on his way to Baghdad by November 1915,<sup>71</sup> and on 4 December 1915 he received reports that indicated that he had arrived. Even though von der Goltz arrived two days later his direct influence on the British Mesopotamian Campaign had already begun. On 4 December Townshend sent a telegram to Nixon from Kut indicating that because of von der Goltz's arrival he expected that his position would be turned and invested.

He believed his position would only delay further movement by the Ottoman Sixth Army south.<sup>72</sup>

Townsend was right, but the decision to turn and invest his position was made by Nurettin and not von der Goltz. Despite his prediction that he would be invested, Townshend justified his defense at Kut because it was a river junction between the Tigris and Hai rivers. He stated that if he retreated beyond this point von der Goltz could advance on Nasiriya to the south, jeopardizing the western flank of the entire British force in Mesopotamia.<sup>73</sup> He thought that if he had not defended Kut the British would have lost Mesopotamia.<sup>74</sup> Surprisingly, these statements show that Townshend began to think of von der Goltz as his Ottoman equivalent almost immediately upon learning of his presence. As 6th Division commander, Townshend held an equivalent level of command with Nurettin. Nixon was von der Goltz's counterpart.

Nurettin began limited attacks on Kut on 8 December 1915. On 10 and 11 December he conducted a corps level attack on the British position with little success. The British, by this time, had successfully entrenched, and the Ottomans did not have the artillery to successfully breach their lines despite outnumbering the defenders three to one. On 12 December von der Goltz arrived at Nurettin's headquarters and fully aware of the devastating nature of modern rifle and machinegun fire on attacking infantry counseled Nurettin to discontinue frontal assaults.<sup>75</sup> Von der Goltz trusted that Nurettin had the situation in hand and returned to Baghdad to focus on future Sixth Army operations in Persia. Over the next ten days Nurettin continued small scale attacks with little success. By this time the fresh troops of the 52nd Division arrived and added to the forces available for employment by Nurettin, and he assigned the fresh division to XVIII Corps. Despite von der Goltz's advise to Nurettin that he should discontinue attacks on the prepared British positions, Nurettin tasked his XVIII Corps commander, Colonel Halil Kut, to plan and conduct a divisional attack with the 52nd Division. The attack of the 52nd Division

took place on 24 December and concentrated on the Kut fort. The attack failed.<sup>76</sup> Townshend blamed failure on the Ottoman commander of the assault despite his claim that von der Goltz was present for the attack.<sup>77</sup> Nurettin's willingness to continue large scale offensive operations against Kut, in spite of von der Goltz's cautions, indicated that von der Goltz was not micromanaging his operations.

During this period von der Goltz remained focused on the operational level of war and his Sixth Army area of operations. He was comfortable that Nurettin had control of the British to the south. His operational focus was demonstrated in a telegram he sent to Constantinople on 20 December 1915. He remarked that his army was not prepared for the coordinated advance of both the British and Russians. The Sixth Army did not have the capability to conduct operations in Persia while operations in Mesopotamia were ongoing, and he attributed this limited offensive capability to the quantity and quality of artillery at his disposal.<sup>78</sup> On 21 December 1915 von der Goltz issued an order organizing the Sixth Army along the lines he required for future operations. He renamed the Iraq Area Command as the Army of Iraq and designated its adjacent commands as the Persia Column, 12th Garrison Command, 13th Garrison Command, River Flotilla and 6th Support Command. Furthermore, on 1 January 1916 von der Goltz again redesignated the Army of Iraq as the Iraq Group and the Persia Column as the Baghdad Group.<sup>79</sup> This corresponded to the German practice of establishing task organized combat groups with specific missions.

Townshend learned of von der Goltz's plan to conduct operations in Persia on 19 December 1915.<sup>80</sup> On 22 December, in a telegram to Lieutenant General Sir Fenton John Aylmer, commander of the Kut relief force, Townshend used this information regarding von der Goltz's intentions to encourage the relief force to act. He stated that if von der Goltz intended to

conduct operations against Persia the only force that would stand in the way of Aylmer would be Nurettin.<sup>81</sup> His statements implied that Nurettin would be easy to defeat without von der Goltz's assistance. In fact von der Goltz's actual influence on tactical operations was much less than the British thought.

On 4 January 1916 Aylmer's relieving force began to move upriver to Shaikh Saad, approximately thirty miles east of Kut.<sup>82</sup> Nurettin responded to this movement by reinforcing his positions downriver from Kut. Nurettin made his decision without von der Goltz being present; <sup>83</sup> however, upon hearing of the imminent engagement, von der Goltz decided to return to Nurettin's headquarters. During this period Nurettin fought a series of delaying actions against Aylmer, attriting the British forces, as they advanced beyond Shaikh Saad. Von der Goltz arrived at Nurettin's headquarters on 13 January.<sup>84</sup> On this date the British Official History states that von der Goltz ordered Nurettin to pull the 52nd and 35th Divisions back to the Hanna defile to prevent the British relief force from cutting them off from their route of withdrawal. This they did successfully at night and under pressure from the British.<sup>85</sup> Von der Goltz viewed the situation facing the Sixth Army as having changed very little. Nurettin's force prevented the British relief force from reaching Kut. The shortage of Ottoman artillery prevented them from assaulting Kut and taking the position by force. The Sixth Army was still under equipped and under supplied. Finally, he believed that if the Russians continued to close from the north the Sixth Army's ability to fight on two fronts would be limited.<sup>86</sup> On 20 January 1916 Nurettin was relieved of command by Enver Pasha. In an act that was likely nepotism, he was replaced by the then XVIII Corps commander Colonel Halil Bey, Enver Pasha's uncle.<sup>87</sup>

Von der Goltz continued to leave the day to day tactical operations to the Ottoman officers and men whom he admired. In a memorandum to German headquarters on 23 March

1916 he gave high praise for the Ottoman soldiers. He said, that despite being outnumbered by the British, they were able to continue the investment of Kut against a force superior in numbers to their own.

In an attempt to portray the Ottoman army poorly, the British Official History minimized the comments of von der Goltz. Instead it credits the inherent strengths of the Ottoman defensive positions with their success.<sup>88</sup> The British relief force continued their attacks in an attempt to relieve Townshend's 6th Division. All of their attempts, including divisional and corps level coordinated attacks, in March and April 1916 failed. Von der Goltz died of typhus on 19 April 1916, and Colonel Halil, the Iraq Group commander, took command of the Ottoman Sixth Army. Finally, with his forces starving, Townshend had no choice but to offer the unconditional surrender of his forces on 29 April 1916.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

Von der Goltz played a key role in setting the conditions for the successful investment of Kut and subsequent British surrender by improving Ottoman military effectiveness. He positively influenced Ottoman military education, arms modernization, conscription, and reorganization during the 1880s and 1890s. Most importantly, he improved and professionalized the Ottoman officer corps. This allowed the Ottoman military to continue to adapt and learn even after von der Goltz departed. His early influence set the conditions for Nurettin, Halil Bey, and Enver Pasha to lead the Ottoman forces effectively during the Mesopotamian campaign.

Because of bias against the Ottomans the British were unable to recognize the military capability of the Ottoman forces they were fighting in Mesopotamia. This bias, combined with the great respect Townshend had for von der Goltz, led him to attribute tactical success to von

der Goltz involvement and prevented him from recognizing the high quality of the Ottoman military commanders he was facing. This belief contrasted with von der Goltz's, who recognized the Ottomans for a competent and well led force. His confidence allowed him to remain focused on the operational level of combat within his army area, rarely making tactical decisions. The British consistently overestimated von der Goltz's input into tactical operations. Had Townshend, Aylmer, or Nixon realized the true capability of the Ottoman leaders and forces they were fighting it is unlikely that they would have attributed as much as they did to von der Goltz's influence.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 66-68.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq 1914-1921* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2010), 155.

<sup>3</sup> Merwin Albert Griffiths, "The Reorganization of the Ottoman Army Under Abdulhamid II, 1880-1897." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1966), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Mesut Uyar, and Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Ataturk* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 206-207.

<sup>5</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 75.

<sup>6</sup> Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, Orden Pour le Mérite, <http://www.orden-pourlemerite.de/mitglieder/colmar-freiherr-von-der-goltz?m=3&u=5>

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia, "Colmar, baron von der Goltz." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colmar\\_Freiherr\\_von\\_der\\_Goltz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colmar_Freiherr_von_der_Goltz) (accessed January 21, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Colmar, baron von der Goltz."

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/238118/Colmar-baron-von-der-Goltz> (accessed December 29, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Feroz Yasamee, "Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz and the Boer War." In *The International Impact of the Boer War*, edited by Keith Wilson, 193-210 (Chesham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2001), 193.

<sup>10</sup> Griffiths, 66.

<sup>11</sup> Uyar and Erickson, 206-207.

<sup>12</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans 1912-1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 53.

<sup>13</sup> Yasamee, 193.

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Colmar, baron von der Goltz."

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/238118/Colmar-baron-von-der-Goltz> (accessed December 29, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>16</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. "Colmar, baron von der Goltz."

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/238118/Colmar-baron-von-der-Goltz> (accessed December 29, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Uyar and Erickson, 205-206.

<sup>19</sup> Griffiths, 55-56.

<sup>20</sup> Mesut Uyar and A. Kadir Varoglu. "In Search of Modernity and Rationality: The Evolution of the Turkish Military Academy Curricula in a Historical Perspective," *Armed Forces & Society* Volume 35 Number 1 (October 2008): 187.

<sup>21</sup> Griffiths, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Colmar von der Goltz, *The Nation in Arms: A Treatise on Modern Military Systems and the Conduct of War*, 5th Edition Translated by Philip A. Ashworth (London: Hugh Rees Limited, 1913), 50-59.

<sup>23</sup> Griffiths, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Uyar and Erickson, 207.

<sup>25</sup> Griffiths, 99-101.

<sup>26</sup> Uyar and Erickson, 207.

<sup>27</sup> Griffiths, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Uyar and Varoglu, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Goltz, *The Nation in Arms*, 5th edition, 313-316.

<sup>33</sup> Colmar von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War: A Short Treatise on its Most Important Branches and Guiding Rules* Edited by Walter H. James. Translated by G.F. Leverson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1908), 181.

<sup>34</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 13.

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<sup>35</sup> Robert W.D. Ball, *Mauser Military Rifles of the World* (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2000), 267-271.

<sup>36</sup> Griffiths, 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Griffiths, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Colmar von der Goltz, *The Nation in Arms*, Translated by Philip A. Ashworth (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1887), 8-13.

<sup>39</sup> Yasamee, 206-207.

<sup>40</sup> Griffiths, 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Griffiths, 75-76.

<sup>43</sup> Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 12-18.

<sup>44</sup> Griffiths, 89-116.

<sup>45</sup> Yasamee, 207-208.

<sup>46</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 177-182.

<sup>47</sup> Goltz, *The Nation in Arms*, 32-33.

<sup>48</sup> Goltz, *The Nation in Arms*, 5th edition, 43-44.

<sup>49</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 177-182.

<sup>50</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 74-75.

<sup>53</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald Millar, *Death of an Army: The Siege of Kut 1915-1916* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 3-5.

<sup>55</sup> Millar, 5-10.

<sup>56</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 75.

<sup>57</sup> Millar, 10-12.

<sup>58</sup> F.J. Moberly, *History of the Great War: The Campaign in Mesopotamia 1914-1918. vol 1* (London: The Imperial War Museum and Nashville, TN: Battery Press, Inc, 1997), 30.

<sup>59</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 66-78.

<sup>60</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 74-79.

<sup>61</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 79-81.

<sup>62</sup> F.J. Moberly, *History of the Great War: The Campaign in Mesopotamia 1914-1918. vol 2* (London: The Imperial War Museum and Nashville, TN: Battery Press, Inc, 1997), 133-137.

<sup>63</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 81-82.

<sup>64</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Charles V.F. Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia* (London: Thorton Butterworth Limited, 1920), 177.

<sup>66</sup> Townshend, 177.

<sup>67</sup> Townshend, 176.

<sup>68</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Townshend, 246.

<sup>70</sup> Townshend, 159-168.

<sup>71</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 56.

<sup>72</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 134-135.

<sup>73</sup> Townshend, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Townshend, 209.

<sup>75</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 172.

<sup>76</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 82-89.

<sup>77</sup> Townshend, 232-233.

<sup>78</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 174-175.

<sup>79</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 89.

<sup>80</sup> Townshend, 230-231.

<sup>81</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 196-197.

<sup>82</sup> A. J. Barker, *The First Iraq War: 1914-1918: Britain's Mesopotamian Campaign*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2009), 149.

<sup>83</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 214.

<sup>84</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 244.

<sup>85</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 254-255.

<sup>86</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 300-301.

<sup>87</sup> Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I*, 94.

<sup>88</sup> Moberly, vol 2, 366-367.

<sup>89</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 150-151.

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